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ABSTRACT

One hundred individuals who dropped out of high school in Lawrence County, Alabama, during the 1986-87 school year were studied in order to help formulate ways schools could prevent students from dropping out and ideas on how to create advertising about available adult education to which such dropouts would be receptive. A former in-home adult education teacher conducted interviews with teachers, guidance counselors, parents, and students for 4 months. The following results were reported for the 100 dropouts: (1) 26 said they dropped out because they were pregnant; (2) 16 said they dropped out because they lost interest in school; (3) 15 were children of divorced or separated parents; (4) 12 said they had a bad home situation that included such problems as drug or alcohol abuse and incest; (5) 7 said they dropped out to get married; (6) 7 moved or transferred to another school; (7) 6 said they dropped out after getting suspended and/or expelled; (8) 5 returned to classes and got their General Educational Development certificate; (9) 4 got jobs; and (10) 2 were enrolled in GED classes at the time of the interviews. It was concluded that dropouts are not interested in returning to class the first year after leaving school so that it may be pointless to advertise adult education to them until they become mature enough to realize the value of furthering their education. Dropout prevention in the form of sex education that begins at a preteen age level and more time for students to talk about home and school problems with counselors were recommended. (CML)

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ABE/GED INSTRUCTION OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

"353" SPECIAL DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

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ABE/GED INSTRUCTION OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

In the fall of 1986, contacts with the twenty-five 1985-86 dropouts at East Lawrence High School in Lawrence County were initiated as part of a "310" (now "353") Special Demonstration Project awarded to the Adult Education program in Lawrence County. That particular school was selected because it had the highest dropout rate in the county that year. The purpose of this project, "ABE/GED Instruction of High School Dropouts," was to increase enrollment in Adult Education classes.

All twenty-five dropouts were contacted by the Adult Education Coordinator that year relative to ABE/GED classes in a classroom or at home. Of this group, six individuals either went to a class or received instruction in their homes. Nine of these dropouts were not interested in the program, and four had no telephone and would not respond to letters. The Figure 1 chart gives a breakdown of statistics for that year.

Status of 1985-86 Dropouts

Not interested in Program	7
Attended regular ABE class	2
Took part in in-home study with teacher	2
Got GED without class or teacher	1
Re-enrolled in high school	1
Enrolled in Calhoun GED program	1
EMR students–not contacted	2
Relocated out of county	3
Interested in Program but have not decided to participate	2
No response from letters and no phone	4
	25

Figure 1

The next year the project was expanded to include the 1986-87 dropouts from all the high schools in the county. Eighty-six of those dropouts were contacted either by letter or telephone. Of that number eight attended ABE/GED classes, and four were involved in home study with "310" teachers. One returned to high school, and three obtained a GED on their own. The others either were not interested or had moved away from the county.

At that point, since only thirteen percent of the previous year's dropouts participated in the GED program, it was suggested that perhaps first-year dropouts are not interested in returning to school or completing their education even through the Adult Education/GED program.

To substantiate this premise, it was decided to research the dropouts by interviewing teachers, guidance counselors, parents, and students where possible. This research was to include determining the parents' educational level and interest in school activities, teachers' and guidance counselors' insight on the dropouts, the students' reasons for dropping out, etc. Then, from the data gathered, it was hoped that recommendations could be formulated for schools to use in preventing students from dropping out as well as ideas on how to gear advertising of Adult Education to reach a receptive audience.

All of this background information brings us to the research done during 1988-89. One of the former in-home Adult Education teachers delved into researching the dropout problem in Lawrence County. After making all the contacts suggested, she brought together the following data for one hundred dropouts.

Twenty-six percent of the girls quit school because of pregnancy, and most of them stated, "I was dumb." Some of these girls have had more children, and some, being single parents, can find no way to get to class to pursue a GED.

Seven percent dropped out to get married, and because survival is so difficult, a number of these individuals indicated that they will take GED classes as they can find a way or time to do so.

Sixteen percent of the students dropped out because they lost interest. And, within this group, many could not read either because they were slow learners or had a learning disability. Since many times these students are repeaters more than once, they finally quit school out of a sense of frustration and failure.

Six percent of the dropouts were so-called problem students -- often with a bad attitude handed down from their parents. After being suspended and/or expelled, they quit school.

Fifteen percent of the dropout students came from broken homes and twelve percent from homes where there were bad situations or circumstances such as alcohol, drugs, incest, abuse, etc. With this last group of dropouts, in particular, most of the parents did not graduate from high school and the children, seemingly, are just following in the parents' footsteps -- perpetuating a cycle.

Another seven percent of the dropouts had transferred to another school or moved, and five percent returned to classes and got their GED's. Two percent of the dropouts were enrolled in GED classes during 1988-89.

So, from four months of interviews, the researcher has concluded that dropouts, indeed, are not interested in returning to class even to work toward a GED that first year or so after dropping out. That being the case, the schools must actively face the challenge of preventing dropouts through heightened teacher awareness and more one-on-one involvement of counselors. Students need more time with counselors to talk out home/class/learning problems. If reading is a problem, remedial reading classes should be available and the student should be required to go. And sex education should start at a pre-teen age level for boys and girls.

With so many factors involved in why students drop out, there have to be many elements in dropout prevention. But, from comments made at the school, perhaps more concern on the part of teachers and administrators could help keep some students from finally quitting. The Figure 2 chart breaks down the data gathered this year by school and by reason for dropping out, and Figure 3 ranks the reasons for dropping out.

Since dropouts are not really interested in pursuing a GED right after quitting school, trying to gear GED class advertising to that group would seem pointless. Dropout prevention, then, is the key -- however that best works in a given location. For dropouts have to become mature enough to see the need and value of furthering their education. Only then will they be interested in Adult Education/GED classes.

1986-87 Dropouts by School/Reason

School	Preg.	Got Marr.	Broken Home	Got GED	Bad Home Sit.	Got Job	Lost Int.	Problem Student	Moved	Taking GED Classes Now	Total
Hatton	2	1	2	1	3	1	3	2	1	0	16
Mt. Hope	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	6
Hazlewood	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	6
Lawrence County High School	9	0	5	2	5	0	0	1	2	2	26
Courtland	5	1	1	1	1	0	4	0	0	0	13
East Lawrence	3	1	5	1	0	0	6	0	1	0	17
Speake	4	2	0	0	3	2	1	3	1	0	16
Total	26	7	15	5	12	4	16	6	7	2	100

Figure 2

SUMMARY of 1986-87 Dropouts by Reason

Pregnant	26
Lost interest	16
Broken home	15
Bad home situation	12
Got married	7
Moved	7
Problem student	6
Got GED	5
Got job	4
Taking GED classes now	2

Figure 3